

VZCZCXRO0703  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHRO #1947/01 1871421  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 061421Z JUL 06  
FM AMEMBASSY ROME  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5278  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 0272  
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 1552  
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 7328  
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 1622  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA PRIORITY 0363

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 001947

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2016  
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SUBJECT: SERBIAN PM KOSTUNICA'S VISIT TO ROME

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Classified By: Classified by David D. Pearce, Political Minister Counselor, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Serbian PM Vojislav Kostunica visited Rome on July 6 to meet with PM Prodi, FM D'Alema, MOI Amato, President of the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Affairs Committee Ranieri, and President of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Dini. Kostunica told the Italians that Serbia would continue to oppose Kosovo independence and would rely on the UN Charter and UNSCR 1244 as legal arguments against an imposed solution in Kosovo. He added that the international community was applying a double standard by granting autonomy and independence to some parts of the Balkans while insisting on the preservation of existing international borders in others. During the meeting at the MFA - the only substantive meeting - D'Alema told Kostunica that Italy was fully supportive of UNOSK Ahtisaari's efforts to find a solution to the Kosovo status question and remained committed to Contact Group unity. He added that Italy believed that Kosovo would be granted some form of independence and urged Kostunica to take the difficult steps necessary to guarantee an EU future for Serbia and to ensure that the needs of Serbs remaining in Kosovo were fully addressed. The acting Serbian PolCouns told Poloff that Kostunica had few illusions that he would be able to change the GOI's views on Kosovo, but was nevertheless disappointed by the meetings. End summary.

Kostunica argues against Kosovo independence  
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12. (C) Acting Serbian PolCouns told poloff that during his meetings with key GOI officials in Rome on July 5, Kostunica argued against Kosovo independence saying that both the UN Charter and UNSCR 1244 provided adequate legal basis for preventing unilateral changes to Serbia's international borders. Kostunica also argued that the international community has used a double standard in its approach to the independence movements in the region - supporting independence for Kosovo and Montenegro, but not others in the region - a clear reference to Serbs in Bosnia. Kostunica complained that the bottom-up approach to the negotiations had produced few results. At the same time, the suspension of talks on EU membership over failure to comply with the ICTY came at a very sensitive time in Belgrade. Kostunica asserted that the suspension of talks tipped the referendum vote in Montenegro in favor of independence.

D'Alema tells Kostunica to expect Kosovo independence and  
move closer to the EU

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13. (C) MFA Balkans Office Director Raimondo De Cardona told  
poloff that during a relatively short meeting, Prodi assured  
Kostunica that he was committed to maintaining good relations  
with Serbia. D'Alema told Kostunica that Italy maintained  
full confidence in Ahtisaari's efforts in Kosovo and would  
not support any changes to the bottom-up approach to  
negotiations. Additionally, Italy would not undertake any  
bilateral efforts that would threaten Contact Group unity.  
The GOI believed that Kosovo would achieve some sort of  
independence in the near future. Despite this, the GOI  
believed that Serbia was central to lasting stability in the  
region and needed to move in the direction of EU membership.  
D'Alema urged Kostunica to begin preparing the Serbian public  
for this inevitability and to take the necessary steps to  
ensure ICTY compliance and guarantee an EU future for Serbia.  
D'Alema added that although ICTY compliance was  
non-negotiable. Italy would carefully study a possible  
Serbian roadmap as a step toward restoring EU membership  
talks.

14. (C) Comment. Kostunica's visit to Rome was - even by the  
Italians' own admission - his best and last chance to create  
doubts in the Contact Group on the Kosovo issue. The people  
Kostunica chose to meet with are at the same time influential  
and knowledgeable about the political situation in the  
Balkans. Some, particularly Dini, are extremely pro-Serbian.  
Nevertheless, Kostunica's lobbying effort will not change  
Italy's commitment to direction and timing of the UNOSSEK  
negotiations or its commitment to Contact Group unity.  
According to the Acting Serbian PolCouns, Kostunica

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understood these odds but was nevertheless "dissatisfied"  
with the results. Internally, however, the Italian MFA  
remains increasingly concerned about the political situation  
in Serbia. De Cardona told Poloff that although the meeting  
between Kostunica and D'Alema was warm, D'Alema was concerned  
that Kostunica appeared to be in full election mode during  
his press appearances aiming his statements toward the  
Serbian public that is opposed to Kosovo's independence. The  
GOI fears that the set of circumstances converging on  
Belgrade - Montenegrin independence, suspension of the EU  
membership talks, Kosovo status talks and possible elections  
- could create an untenable situation for Kostunica - and for  
the international community. The Italians insist that the  
Contact Group must find a way to restore the one crucial  
incentive the Euro-Atlantic community has for Serbia -  
possible EU membership.  
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